**What is program evaluation? What types of evaluation are there?**

Program evaluation is a way of assessing the usefulness of a program. It is often started by considering the positives and negatives of an existing program and questioning what outcomes have been met and what things could be done differently to allow for future change and improvement. It usually falls into three categories. One can evaluate the process that was followed and whether or not it followed the pre-determined plan. One can consider the impact the program has had on individuals that are affected by it or one can consider whether or not it has met the long term intended outcomes.

**Why do we do needs assessments and how do we do them?**

A needs assessment is done prior to an evaluation process as a way to determine what we hope will come out of the actual evaluation. A needs assessment determines what needs are being met and what needs are not. The first step is to identify the strengths and weaknesses that exist in an organization. It is necessary to identify the weaknesses so that they may be reassessed and strengthened. Priorities must then be set. Which issues are the most important and which are the least? Then consideration must be given to the changes that are necessary within the system and how they can be changed.

**Does empowerment evaluation actually encourage empowerment?**

This type of evaluation is done to guide participants through a self-evaluation process that hopefully will encourage the people involved to want to improve programs. It starts with a goal or focus that is used as a starting point for any evaluation activities that follow. Program activities must be discussed and ranked before all participants or stakeholders consider how well each is working for them using a rating scale. The results of the rating scale are compared and the commonality of the answers is considered for improvement. The opportunity for each of the stakeholders or participants to voice an individual opinion and feel involved in the process will hopefully encourage a inner drive for change.

**What is the logic model of evaluation?**

It is a way of showing what is going to happen and what the outcomes should be by using a picture or diagram. It can be presented starting from the final expected result and working through the steps that need to be in place to get there. It can also be presented the opposite way, by starting with the things that need to happen first and having them lead to the final desired result. This type of evaluation helps highlight the most important aspects of the process but, it can also be very time consuming and it is sometimes difficult to illustrate all aspects of the program.

**What is effective evaluation?**

Evaluation can only be effective if it is useful and meets the needs of the participants of the program. It has to be a realistic process that falls within the parameters that have been set for resources and time. Consideration needs to be given to any legal or ethical implications of the evaluation process. It needs to be clearly and specifically planned and presented so that it is reliable and valid. It is important to involve all stakeholders in the process so they are informed and are more likely to take an active role in the success of the program. The information that is gathered from an evaluation should be used to implement change or make recommendations.

**What is different about participatory evaluation?**

All the stakeholders are involved in the evaluation process and are not just being evaluated. Stakeholders at all levels of an organization should be involved in a participatory evaluation. This type of evaluation requires large amount of time and resources because it is an ongoing process but, it tends to be more up to date, accurate and useful. They are usually driven by a steering committee of representatives from all levels of stakeholders.

**How do you go about dissemination?**

Dissemination is the communication of evaluation results to all levels of stakeholders involved. It only makes sense that that all levels of stakeholders must first be identified and a communication process must by developed and used. It is extremely important that evaluators be well informed about all aspects of programs they are evaluating. It will be easier to communicate information about the evaluation and answer questions asked by stakeholders. The dissemination process needs to be timely and regular and it is important to decide what will happen to evaluation results when the process is finished. The presentation of evaluation results and recommendations should be presented to all stakeholders and different presentation modes may be necessary.

**What are the common methods of program evaluation**?

Some of the most common methods are: focus groups that can represent a target population, careful record keeping and data management and the use of surveys and interviews and case studies.

It is interesting to think about the evaluation processes that I have been involved in as I was reading through the information. I was considering what things that I found frustrating as an evaluator and as a person who was being evaluated. I was also thinking of the things that seemed to be useful and positive about evaluation. The most interesting part of the reading for me was the empowerment evaluation model and the participatory evaluation. It seemed to me that they were closely related and were held together by the idea of involving people in their own evaluations rather than pushing a threatening evaluation process on participants. Most of my experiences with evaluation in the public education system, in Manitoba and now in Saskatchewan, have been just the opposite of the empowerment evaluation model. It seems to me that most times things are pushed upon teachers and when we are evaluated we have very little to say about the process.

I have seen some progress in some of the evaluation processes. I have been in the situation where a superintendent would walk into my classroom, demand to see my unit plans and my day book, observe for 20 minutes and that was my evaluation. I did not know what the intended expectations were before the evaluation took place and did not feel like any form of discussion took place or commonality of goals existed.

In our school division at the present we use a goal setting process of evaluation that is just the opposite of that. We are allowed to choose our own evaluation goals and plan our own route to meeting them. The process used to evaluate them is collaborative involving administrators and other people that we feel would be useful to the meeting of our goals. This process allows teachers to work on things that are useful and important to them. The problem with this type of evaluation, that I can see, is that it may be difficult to gather data, if that was necessary.

I am in the job situation now where I am in the position of evaluation. It is important to me to involve the people that I evaluate in the evaluation process. My leadership style fits with participatory evaluation. Why not build on people’s strengths and give them the opportunity for change for the better? When all stakeholders are involved and feel part of the evaluative team, they may be more inclined to work harder towards a common set of priorities. It is important to constantly review the positive and negative aspects of an ongoing team initiative and find out what individual frustrations are. The team can then regroup to ensure that they are working toward the outcomes that have been set. As a learning support teacher working with approx. 11 educational assistants, it can be a difficult job to keep everyone on the learning support team working toward the common school goals. It is important to bring all stakeholders (educational assistants, administrators and teachers) together on a periodic basis and find out what is going well and what is not working at all. As we set up our learning support team for next year and evaluate how this school year has gone, we, as team leaders, should remember what we have been told by all of our stakeholders and do what we can to ensure that suggestions are incorporated into next year’s plan. It is also important to provide support to those stakeholders that need it, so they are able to keep improving and feel supported by members of their evaluative team.

The information in the reading has helped me understand the different aspects of evaluation. There are more and more situations that we are in every day that require the evaluation and evidence that we have met our goals. We have to be held accountable to parents, administrators, government and in my position, teachers and educational assistants. I have to provide evidence that students are meeting goals and evaluate the programs that I have running in the school. I have to be able to make connections and provide proof of student progress or funding will be cut and students will miss out on things that they should have. The dissemination process is an important one. I have to have a plan as to how I can get the evidence that I have met my goals out to all of the stakeholders. Each stakeholder will use the data in a different way. The methods given in the reading are all good tools to use in my evaluation processes. It is interesting to see that things that I am doing all the time are methods of program evaluation if planned, used and presented in the right way.